

December 2, 2014

Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Sir/Madame,

I am writing today in response to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler's recently announced proposal to raise the E-Rate funding cap by \$1.5 billion. The E-Rate program currently represents the only source of federal funding aimed at educational technology and is critical in providing discounts to assist schools (like mine) to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access. As Superintendent in Weslaco Independent School District (Weslaco, Texas), I strongly support the infusion of the additional funding, and urge you to do the same.

In Weslaco Independent School District, a district where a large percentage of our students are economically disadvantaged, we have relied heavily on E-Rate funding to assist us with providing the Internet access and network infrastructure necessary to support our instructional programs. The ever-increasing use of technology and the Internet in classroom instruction requires that we maintain a high-speed Internet connection to support these instructional initiatives. In addition to the high-speed Internet connection, we also need to ensure that the network infrastructure (i.e. switches, routers and network cabling) that connect the classroom computers to the Internet cloud is also maintained and upgraded as needed. E-Rate funding has made 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning in the classrooms a possibility, and increasing the available funding to ensure that this program is able to keep pace with the growing need required to prepare our students for an uncertain future is essential to our continuing success.


To raise the cap of the E-Rate program by \$1.5 billion, the Universal Service Fund fee will increase by 16 cents per month per account. 16 additional cents per month—less than half a penny per day—totals to an additional \$1.92 per year, approximately the cost of a cup of coffee. This proposal is both reasonable and justified, asking contributors to forgo one cup of coffee over the course of a year to ensure that our nation's schools and libraries are connected to the internet in a way that supports 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and prepares them for post-secondary opportunity.

No one questions that it is time to ensure that our libraries and schools are connected with the quality of connectivity that is sufficient and scalable for today's ever-growing connectivity needs. In less than twenty years since Congress established the program, E-Rate played a critical role in transforming levels of connectivity from less than one-quarter of schools and libraries to nearly all connected today. The E-Rate program's work is not done: Achieving the laudable broadband goals adopted by the Commission in July will require additional investment. The biggest obstacle the E-Rate program faces, even with the recent changes, remains the strain of increasing demand for E-Rate-supported services and persistently low funding. Failure to rectify the low funding would only result in regression of the progress that has been made in preparing our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The single most effective step the FCC can take to bolster E-Rate's current and future success is to ensure that the program's funding is adequate to support, in a sustainable manner, the program's changes and goals as adopted in July. Chairman Wheeler's proposal does just that, representing a deliberate effort to expand educational opportunities for our nation's students. By focusing on high-capacity broadband connections to the internet (particularly those in rural communities) and providing sustained, additional funding to the E-Rate program, the modernized E-Rate will ensure the nation's schools—including mine—are able to keep pace with ever increasing connectivity needs.

Thank you for considering my response as you move forward with your decision on the E-Rate program and its funding. I applaud Chairman Wheeler and the FCC for its continued efforts to protect the already oversubscribed E-Rate program by ensuring the future of this successful program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ruben Alejandro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ruben" and last name "Alejandro" clearly legible.

Dr. Ruben Alejandro  
Superintendent of Schools